



St. Paul Lutheran Church ELCA

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SEPTEMBER 2026

"Living in Hope"

Have you ever visited the town of Flagstaff, Maine? Me neither. And unless you and I take up scuba-diving, we never will. A few years ago I came across a reference to this town and, intrigued, went online and read a few articles about it. I must admit that the information and stories made me rather sad. But I'm not sharing it to stir up sadness for you! We certainly don't need anything else in these days to feed negativity and sadness. Instead, I share the following in an attempt to lead us to something better - hope.



Here is a paragraph from Edward Chinn's book *"The Wonder of Words (Book Two)."*

"Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.' Those words come from a man who lived in the town of Flagstaff, Maine, years ago. The town was to be taken over as part of a hydroelectric development. Because a dam was being built, Flagstaff would soon be under water. In the months before this was accomplished, all improvements and repairs to homes and other buildings came to a dead stop. People in the town said to themselves: "What's the sense of painting the house if it's going to be covered with water in six months? Why fix anything?" Week by week the little town became more and more bedraggled, forlorn, and shabby. It went to seed, long before the waters came, because it lost *hope*."

The loss of hope is a difficult thing to witness - and an even more difficult thing to experience for oneself. The loss of hope is not only an awful feeling, it

leads to actions - and inactions - of neglect and despair. It not only happens with condemned towns. When individual people lose hope, they sometimes quit taking care of their own bodies, their loved ones, their relationships with others and with the Lord, and of the future. Why bother thinking about or caring for the future when one has little hope that there *will* be a future? At least one worth caring about?

I am not without hope in these trying days. But I confess that I have been greatly disheartened by much of what is happening in our country and in this world in these days. And in my conversations with some of you, I know that I am not alone in my internal struggles and feelings.

I am heartsick about the political divisiveness that shows itself in almost **EVERYTHING** these days. It used to be that we could disagree with each other - and that was okay. Disagreement is now a matter of belittling and demeaning others - in both words and actions.

The situation of the wars in this world sickens me, whether it be in Ukraine, Iran, Gaza, Sudan, Yemen, etc. I hurt for the people of Venezuela, Colombia, and Indonesia as they have suffered tremendous losses in the recent earthquakes. Recurrent examples of outright racism and attacks on legal and illegal immigrants (or on those who "look like" they could be immigrants) in this country and in too many places in the world astound and dismay me over and over again. I shake my head in dismay as I watch flames eat up homes and communities in the world. I am angry at the denial of the reality of a change in our climate that will negatively affect the world for my grandchildren, and my grandchildren's grandchildren - and for the grandchildren of so many others throughout this entire world. Trust in our medical and science professionals is not only eroding in many circles, but they and the scientific facts they lift up are purposely being attacked and lied about. The result? Our children and others, both in the present and in the future, are being put into danger.

There is so much that can weigh heavy on us in these days. And it does. And I know that in the face of such heaviness, I have some decisions to make.

If, indeed, all hope is lost, I can stop taking care of myself, my vocation, my relationships, this world, those around me, and our children. "To heck with it all!"

Or I can respond as a follower of Jesus Christ and live as one who, if not filled-to-overflowing with hope, is open to receive this gift once again.

How does one live in hope? How about by taking loving care of God's gifts around oneself - the people and children around us and far from us, and God's creation itself?

Praying for and living in God's gift of hope with you,

Pastor Mark S. Luepke

Join us For Worship

9:00 a.m. worship to praise God.

The Livestream can be accessed by clicking [HERE](#)



This past month we have prayed for the following: Craig Green, Tricia M., Ken & Stephanie, Maggie Villafuerto, Richard J., Melinda, Callahan McCallister, Brock Woessner, Lori Dewey, the Woodworth family, Michelle Klinger, Matt Friel, Sandy Julifs, Mike, Dylan Wescott, and Phyllis Jacobson.

Please contact Sue in the church office if you have a prayer request for the congregational prayer list.

Church Announcements

St. Paul Year Budget Report

2026 Budget \$309,934 (\$25,828 Monthly)

Totals through August 28, 2026

Budgeted Expenses \$206,624

Offerings/Interest \$135,220

Expenses \$137,075



HYMN SING

On Sunday, September 6 starting at 8:45 a.m. we will have a hymn sing before worship. Have the hymn numbers ready of your favorites, that you'd like us to sing together that day! Come early to worship and bring your voice - or just enjoy listening to others!



Please keep our home visitation members and friends in your thoughts and prayers. If you would like the address for anyone listed here, please contact Sue in the church office.

Shirley Dodd

Katherine Janssen

Cliff Miller

Sandra Sweitzer

Dale Worley

Lori Dewey (now residing at Heritage Woods in Sterling)

Sandy Julifs (currently residing at Citadel in Sterling)

Please join us for BBT in September! The purpose of BBT is to share life together; connecting in God's love and welcoming God's presence in all of life. These are no host gatherings for all interested parties. **Please join us for BBT on Tuesday, September 8 at 11:30 a.m.** at Sterling Arthur's Garden Deli.. **You are also welcome to join us for BBT on Tuesday, September 29 at 11:30 a.m.** at Benny's in Sterling. **Come and share life with God and each other at BBT!**

**Breaking
Bread
Together
BBT**

Stewardship – To Find Joy, Give Generously



When one tugs at a single thing in nature,
He finds it attached to the rest of the world
The earth will not continue to offer its harvest,
Except with faithful stewardship. We
Cannot say we love the land
And then take steps to destroy it
For use by future generations

Treat your treasures as a trust; God will meet your deepest needs.

Use your talents!!

Give generously with a grateful heart!



Tri Church Menz Group will meet at St. John's Lutheran Church in Sterling on Monday, September 14 at 6:00 p.m. A hearty welcome and invitation is extended!

BIRTHDAYS FOR OUR CHURCH MEMBERS & FRIENDS

If you don't see your name on this list or there is a correction to be made, please let Sue know in the church office.

1	Bill Duncan	<u>Happy 41st Anniversary</u>
6	Donna Kendall	September 14, 1985
7	Rayce Gale	Scott & Eileen Wolber
18	Elizabeth Engstrom	
18	Bradyn Arians	<u>Happy 61st Anniversary</u>
21	Sharon Worley	September 18, 1965
22	Brent Eilers	Mel & Kathy Johnson
25	Samantha Spaulding	
27	Luke Steinke	<u>Happy 33rd Anniversary</u>
29	Keith Peugh	September 25, 1993
	Scot Beyer	Lyle & Liz Spaulding





WELCA Tri-Church

Evening Gather Bible Study

Coordinator Karen Wolfe

Meets the 1st Tuesday of Each Month at St. John's at 6:00 p.m.

Next meeting is Tuesday, September 1, 2026

No preparation needed – join us for learning and conversation!

Morning Gather Bible Study

Coordinator Ronda Borgmann

Meets the 3rd Tuesday of Each Month at Immanuel at 9:00 a.m.

Next meeting is Tuesday, September 15, 2026

No preparation needed – join us for learning and conversation!

Quilting for Lutheran World Relief

Co-coordinators Deb O'Brien and Dawn Waite

Meets the 3rd Wednesday of Each Month at St. Paul at 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Next meeting is Wednesday, September 16, 2026

No experience necessary – join us for fun while we do this important work!

Family Group

Coordinator Gabby Law

Meets the 3rd Wednesday of each month at St. Paul from 5:30-7:00 p.m.

Next meeting is Wednesday, September 16, 2026

Adult bible study time with frozen pizzas for supper and a guided children's activity – join as you are able!

Church Ladies Eating Out (CLEO)

Coordinator Judy Bartel

Meets the last Monday of each month at different restaurants at 5:30 p.m.

Next meeting is Monday, September 28, 2026; (call Judy for location)

RSVP to Judy Bartel each month at 815-751-6768 if you can join!

Lutheran World Relief Quilting

Our next quilting day will be on Wednesday, September 16 from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. in the Social Please join us as we time and pin the quilts.



We will decorate the Sanctuary with the quilts for the September 20th Quilt Blessing during worship.

We plan to take the quilts, personal care kits and school backpacks to the Elgin Warehouse on September 21, 2026. They will then be put in the semi-truck and head to be delivered to those in need.

Thank you to all who have donated to this great cause.

If you have questions regarding the quilting contact Dawn Waite (815-631-8142) or Debbie O'Brien (815-441-0257).

Decorate Leader Needed



Have you started your Christmas shopping? In looking toward the upcoming Holiday Season, we are looking for someone to lead the Christmas decorating team. Nancy Eilers has held this position for several years and has decided to step

down. If you feel that is something you are interested in, please talk to Nancy or Sue in the church office. Thank you for prayerfully considering this.

Immanuel Bell Choir is beginning it's season. If you are interesting playing bells with them, please let Sue in the church office know. They meet on Thursday evenings, usually 2 or 3 Thursdays a month at 5:00 p.m. in the weeks prior to the first Sunday of the month when they offer their musical selection.



Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I want to thank everyone who attended the Wednesday night worship on July 29th. I know how much work was put in by everyone involved, beginning with a text chain that began in late May or early June, continuing with the work involved in crafting the worship format, until the day itself, when a host of people did all the set-up from chairs to

snacks. I have two admissions to make, I was completely prepared to receive my Diakonia graduation certification and cross through the mail and secondly, how overwhelmed I was during the service. The reality of the day, was yes, I was being

recognized, but more importantly, how truly successful the Tri-Church program has become and how the extended invitation to other churches in the area shows the impact of when we “church together”. There were at least 8 different congregations represented that evening and when more than 50 voices are raised in song and receive Holy Communion together it shows without question that Christ himself is present among us. For my St. John’s family, thank you, you will always be home for me, you are the foundation of who I am. For the Tri-church, thank you, we are more than just Lenten worship and shared Confirmation and these types of events prove this. For 1st Lutheran and Trinity who I am honored to serve, thank you for making the trip, it meant more to me than I can express. Pastor Jana, Pastor Barb, Doug and Somar thank you. Together we are the body, doing good works in Christ name, never doubt this fact.

With my deepest gratitude and thanks, Shawn Wolfe





Tri Church TEN: Our Story Unfolds

In each of the newsletters leading up to the January 17, 2027 joint worship and celebration at St. Paul, Tri Church will share some moments in history a few years at a time.

Beginning in mid-2016, a group from Immanuel, St. John's and St. Paul

gathered monthly at Self-Help in Sterling to meet with Northern IL Synod staff. They prayed, explored and pondered, "What is God's dream for the three churches?" They dreamt and discovered ways that we could be church together.

Led by Tri Church's first mission, *"United in Jesus' love, we learn, serve, and grow through faith and action,"* Tri Church began "flying solo" in January 2017 without Synod facilitation. The first Tri Church God's Work Our Hands Sunday was held in September 2017 and included worship and various community projects. In November, Tri Church hosted and served a staff appreciation event for Lutheran Social Services of IL. 2017 was indeed a year marked by learning and growing together and curiosity for what was next!

Tri Church's first summer worship was held at the Rock Falls Riverfront in June 2018 and included a send-off for youth attending the National Youth Gathering. The first major project of Tri Church was Bouquets of Hope, a fund-raiser for Rock River Hospice & Home. Exceeding our goal, \$19,000 was raised for patient/family recliners. What a witness to the community – working and serving as church together!

Next month, highlights will be shared from the 2019 and 2020 years. And . . . save the date for January 17, 2027 at 9:15 am at St. Paul for the 10th Anniversary worship and brunch!

Deb Keaschall

Tri Church Convener

September Tri Church Activities & Meetings

- 1 – WELCA Evening Gather Bible Study @ St. John's, 6 pm
- 7 – Menz Group @ St. John's, 6 pm
- 15 – WELCA Morning Gather Bible Study @ Immanuel, 9 am
- 16 - WELCA Quilting for Lutheran World Relief @ St. Paul, 9 am
- 16 - WELCA Family Group Meeting @ St. Paul, 5:30-7 pm
- 20 – Confirmation @ St. John's, 11 am – 2 pm
- 27 – Birthday Buddies Cookout @ LSSI Group Home, 4 pm
- 28 – WELCA CLEO (Church Ladies Eating Out), 5:30 pm
(RSVP to Judy Bartel at 815-751-6768)

NOTE: No Tri Church Leadership Team meeting in September

Tri Church Birthday Buddy Update and Fall Cookout

We give thanks for Tri Church Birthday Buddies!

Residents of LSSI Group Homes birthdays are celebrated by Immanuel, St. John's and St. Paul on a rotating schedule. A small gift, cards and cupcakes are shared with residents and volunteers who join in the celebration. We are in our third year of this partnership with LSSI and it has been a mutual blessing to all involved. What a gift it is to share life and God's love together!



While birthday parties continue for the residents of the LSSI Sterling Group Home and Partnership House, a special activity in the fall is becoming a tradition. **This year on Sunday, September 27th beginning at 4 pm, Tri Church will be hosting activities for the residents with a cookout to follow at 4:45 pm at the Group Home (104 6th Avenue, Sterling).**

You are invited to join in sharing time and a meal with our nine Birthday Buddies. If you plan to attend, please let Deb Keaschall know at 815-718-5237 or email debkeaschall@gmail.com. Please bring a lawn chair as we will be outdoors.

LSSI is very grateful for the Tri Church partnership with the Birthday Buddy program. Whether you have helped plan a birthday party, shop for gifts, attend a party, signed or sent a card - thank you for making these residents feel special and recognized on their birthday. **We are church together!**

Youth News!



Children's Offering

The September Children's offering will go to towards The Buddy Bag program. Be assured that every penny donated goes only to the cost of purchasing the food. All administrative costs are covered separately.

Bibles

If your child, grandchild or some young person in your life would like a Bible, see Miss Gabby.



NEW! Sunday School – Fall 2026

St. Paul and St. John's will be combining classes this year. Classes will be held at St. Paul at 10:15 a.m.



Tri Church Confirmation

2026-2027 Confirmation year:

September 20, Confirmation, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. at St. John's (703 3rd Ave., Sterling)

Old Testament

October 4, Confirmation, 11 a.m., - 2 p.m. at Immanuel (501 8th Ave., Rock Falls)

Old Testament

October 7, 7 p.m. *SERVICE NIGHT—Packing BUDDY BAGS at Wesley United Methodist (2200 16th Ave., Sterling)*

November 8, Confirmation, 11 a.m., - 2 p.m. at St. Paul, Old Testament

November 20-21 *LOMC Retreat*

December 6, Confirmation, 11 a.m., - 2 p.m. at St. John's, Old Testament Review

Quiz and Celebrating Jesus' Birth

January 10, Confirmation, 11 a.m., - 2 p.m. at Immanuel, New Testament

January 13, 7 p.m. *SERVICE NIGHT—Packing BUDDY BAGS at Wesley United Methodist (2200 16th Ave., Sterling)*

February 7, Confirmation, 11 a.m., - 2 p.m. at St. Paul, New Testament

February 12-14 *Wisconsin Dells Youth Quake*

March 7, Confirmation, 11 a.m., - 2 p.m. at St. John's, New Testament

April 11, Confirmation, 11 a.m., - 2 p.m. at Immanuel New Testament

April 14, 7 p.m. **SERVICE NIGHT—Packing BUDDY BAGS** at Wesley United Methodist (2200 16th Ave., Sterling)

May 2, Confirmation, 11 a.m., - 2 p.m. at St. Paul

New Testament Final Review & Quiz, Year End Celebration

Please note: This schedule is subject to changes and additions. We will do our best to communicate any changes through email, text and congregational publications.

We anticipate a wondrous year of Growing in Christ together!

--Gabby, Pastor Bree, & Pastor Jacob



LSSI Trunk or Treat

On October 17th, LSSI is hosting a trunk or treat for their youth and families served by their foster care program at Nachusa. They are looking for donations of candy, individual snack packs, and juice boxes. Please bring any donations by October 4th.



ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

RALLY Day

SEPTEMBER 13TH
10:15-11:30

Join us as we kick-off the start of the Sunday School Year! Families will register their children for Sunday School while the kids get to play and celebrate. We will have snacks and treats, games, and the bounce house available for students and families.



1701 16TH AVE. STERLING, IL

CONTACT MISS GABBY WITH ANY QUESTIONS
GABBY@STPAULSTERLING.COM



Community Announcements

World Suicide Prevention Day – Candlelight Vigil

Make plans to attend the 2nd Annual: World Suicide Prevention Day Candlelight Vigil, Thursday, September 10, at 7:45 p.m. at Grandon Civic Center. Come witness the light, and shine brighter together in honor of those we have lost to suicide and in support of suicide awareness. Vigil begins at 8:00 p.m.



Twin Cities Homeless Shelter (PADS)

All services at the Twin Cities Homeless Shelter (PADS) will be closed starting September 1, 2026. According to a press release from the board, they closure is due to funding and staffing issues. The closure provides an opportunity for the shelter to work with the community to restructure in hope of reopening. Approximately 30 men and women currently depend on the shelter for housing, meals, and case management services will be directly affected by this closure. With the assistance of Tri-County Opportunities Council (TCOC), help is being provided to the people currently at the shelter to find housing. A task force is being set up with TCOC and CGH Medical Center in order to provide immediate resources for clients.

The Loaves and Fishes Breakfast Program at First United Methodist Church, Sterling, serves hundreds of meals each week day! Plastic grocery sacks are needed. Please place your plastic grocery bags donations in the box at the back of the sanctuary.



TELEPHONE PRAYER SUPPORT GROUP

We welcome your prayer requests and also your praise reports:

(Want to be a part of this? Call the church office.)

Church office – 815-625-3069

Janie Billings

Judy Bartel

Greg Zeigler

James 5:16 *Pray one for another.*

DIRECTORY OF STAFF and CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL

Pastor Mark Luepke

pastormark@stpaulsterling.com

Sue Dirks, Parish Secretary

(815) 535-3574 – sue@stpaulsterling.com

Gabby Law, Children Ministry

(815) 981-6470 – gabby@stpaulsterling.com

Dawn Zeigler, Music Coordinator

(815) 275-3775 – dawn@stpaulsterling.com

Nancy Eilers, Custodian – (815) 441-4435;

Amanda Fortune, Custodian – (815) 499-5190

Julie Woessner DeJonge, Music Leader – (815) 441-8084



2025 Congregation Council

President – Greg Zeigler

Vice President – Julie Woessner DeJonge

Treasurer – Chrissy Zollinger

Secretary – Stacey Avelar

Christian Education/Youth

Stacey Avelar ('27)

Lay Ministry & Worship

Chrissy Zollinger ('27)

Julie Woessner ('27)

Stewardship

Greg Zeigler ('27)

Property & Management

Rayce Gale ('27)

Social Outreach

Stacey Avelar ('27)

Dawn Waite ('28)

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

1701 Sixteenth Ave.
STERLING, ILLINOIS 61081

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**– DATED MATERIAL –
PLEASE DO NOT HOLD**



LOVING – SERVING – SHARING

DIRECTORY

Office (815) 625-3069

Office Hours: Monday – Thursday; 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Friday – 8:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Pastor Mark's hours – Tuesdays – 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

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